

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE DESTRUCTION OF WORLD HERITAGE AS GLOBAL PROPAGANDA

Redes sociales y la destruccion del Patrimonio Mundial como propaganda

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*The war against architecture ... is the destruction of the cultural
artefacts of an enemy people or nation as a means of dominating,
terrorizing, dividing or eradicating it.*

(Robert Bevan 2006:210)

Culture has always been under threat. Throughout history humans have used symbols to demarcate territories, convey or restrict information, control space and express cohesion, exclusion and identity (Robb 2008). Symbolic objects, such as steles, menhir and rock art, as well as buildings, monuments and statues, have been tangible signifiers of a society's history, memory and cultural values. Intangible aspects of culture have converged with these tangible symbols to form a society's identity and to commemorate its memories. Success in conflicts has been entwined with the destruction of these cultural icons (Bevan 2006). Obvious examples include the attempts of later Pharaohs to erase all memories of Akhenaten and his religion, the Roman destruction of Carthage and the iconoclasm of the Reformation (Kastenburg 1997:277). The symbolic communication of these victories was primarily aimed at a local audience, as part of localised strategies of subjugation. However, symbolic communications about distant victories found occasional manifestation in the removal of cultural icons, such as the Medusa heads that are now located in the cisterns of Istanbul (Figure 1) or through sketches or paintings that depict important battles or victories (Figure 2). As Stone (2012:272) states, the physical remains of the past and their interpretation are frequently at the heart of these conflicts.

The challenges of protecting cultural heritage today, however, are very different to those of previous decades. The link between cultural heritage and nation-building has been investigated from a range of perspectives (e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Kohl et al. 2007; Zerubavel 1996), particularly in terms of the contested meanings of monuments and museums (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007; Tota 2002; Schwartz and Bayma 1999), as well as in terms of the processes by which some things are memorialized whilst others are forgotten, erased or

misused (Bartmański 2011; Holtorf and Christensen 2014; Jordan 2006; Rivera 2008; Stone and MacKenzie 1990). Prompted by the recent conflicts in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan, scholars have discussed the destruction of cultural heritage in the context of contemporary conflicts (e.g. Meskell in press; Stone 2012; Willems 2014). This destruction impacts upon the identity of people, particularly when the target has symbolic value:

Symbols are what unite and divide people. Symbols give us identity, our self –image, our way of explaining ourselves to others. Symbols in turn determine the kinds of stories we tell; and the stories we tell determine the kind of history we make and remake. (Mary Robinson, Inauguration speech as President of Ireland, December 3, 1990)



Figure 1. A close-up of one of the two Medusa heads that were re-used as column foundations in the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul, Turkey.



Figure 2. Example of a painting that depicts an important battle or victory. The Battle of Resaca, May 13 to 16, 1864” a Civil War painting, ca. 1889.

Some of the most symbolic sites in the world are those that are designated as World Heritage. A nuanced understanding of emerging threats to World Heritage requires consideration of the changing character of both conflict and communication media and how these changes impact upon the destruction of cultural icons. However, apart from Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2003), few archaeologists have focussed their attention on this issue. In this paper I use recent insights from communication studies and from the study of conflict to develop a new appreciation of the vulnerability of World Heritage sites in zones of conflict.

This paper has two strands. Firstly, it considers the changing character of conflict, particularly the nature of modern terrorism, and how this is impacting upon cultural icons. Secondly, it considers the changing character of communication, in particular, the movement from mass communication to networked communication. Subsequently, these strands are considered in tandem to identify a new vulnerability for World Heritage sites in contemporary conflicts. I argue that vast changes in the media landscape, combined with changes in the nature of conflicts, constitute an unrecognised threat to cultural heritage, and that World Heritage sites are increasingly vulnerable to extremists seeking maximum impact for their political agendas. What is new is the opportunity that the media revolution provides for the increased impact of destruction, both locally and globally. As such, new media constitutes a fresh—and currently under-rated—threat to cultural heritage.

1. THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF CONFLICT

As the editors of the *Small Wars Journal* (SWJ Editors 2008) point out, the 21st century offers significant threats and challenges that are without precedent. Fresh challenges posed by terrorism, transnational threats, and the security environment of a post-Cold War world mean that contemporary conflict is fundamentally different to that which preceded it (SWJ Editors 2008). Traditionally, war was a means to achieve material or territorial goals and was conducted between nation states that deployed armies. However, conventional wars between states are being increasingly supplanted by ‘small wars’, in which a dominant state combines military force and diplomatic pressure to promote change in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is ‘unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory’, as outlined in the *Small Wars Manual* (United States Marine Corps 1940:1). The United States, for example, was involved in four major wars during the twentieth century, but participated in over 60 small wars (Collins 1991). Small wars increasingly are being fought in the context of modern terrorism, which engages small groups rather than organised armies and spans military, political, social, civil, cultural and economic landscapes. Unlike nation-state warfare, which

traditionally emphasizes conquering or acquiring key resources or territory, contemporary conflicts focus on political, ideological and religious objectives.

What is terrorism? Despite extensive surveys (Schmid 1984) and debates (Laqueur 1987), there is no single agreed definition of terrorism. Even within the same country different government departments and agencies have varying definitions, crafted according to the perspectives and priorities of the particular agency. In the United States, for example, the definitions used by the US State Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Defence place varying emphasis on the psychological aspects of terrorism, such as intimidation, coercion or threat, and on the role of property in terrorism (see discussion in Hoffman 2006:30-33). While recognising these difficulties Hoffman (2006) provides an effective characterisation of terrorism as:

... fundamentally and inherently political. It is also ineluctably about power: the pursuit of power, the acquisition of power, and the use of power to achieve political change. Terrorism is thus violence -- or, equally important, the threat of violence -- used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim ... This definition underscores the other fundamental characteristic of terrorism: that it is a planned, calculated, and indeed systematic act (Hoffman 2006:2-3).

For many years, the accepted characterisations of terrorism identified it with revolution aimed at shattering an 'existing political system and seizing power in the name of the revolution' (Wilkinson 1977:107). Ironically, much of this history was one of altruism and the pursuit of change. Indeed, Konrad Kellen (1982:10) has argued that a 'terrorist without a cause (at least in his own mind) is not a terrorist'. Within the context of the French Revolution, terrorism was associated with the ideals of virtue and democracy. The revolutionary leader Robespierre argued that virtue must be allied with terror in order for democracy to triumph through revolution. He appealed to 'virtue, without which terror is evil; terror, without which virtue is helpless', and proclaimed: 'Terror is nothing but prompt, severe inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue' (Robespierre 1794). Hoffman (2006:38) also emphasizes the psychological aspects of terrorism, stating that 'the terrorist is fundamentally a *violent intellectual*, prepared to use and indeed committed to using force in the attainment of his goals'. Given the above, it seems reasonable to define a modern terrorist as a rational individual with a cause, a mobile phone and a willingness to undertake violent action.

Part of the planned, calculated and systematic nature of modern terrorism is rooted in the trend for small, globally dispersed groups to wage war, not only on a local level, but also across different sites and locations around the world

(Kaldor 2007:96). Terrorist networks, which may have only dozens or hundreds of members, often do not hold territory and do not directly confront military forces (Cronin 2015). Furthermore, not all members of these networks are active terrorists and in recent years some groups have adopted a strategy of 'leaderless networks' in order to avoid tracing by intelligence agencies (Hoffman 2006:38). Unprecedented numbers of people have moved to conflict zones, such as Syria, in much the same way that people travelled to take part in the Spanish Civil War (Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2014:19), resulting in one in nine foreign fighters being assessed as a security risk when returning to their home country (Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2014:67). Shiraz Maher, a senior fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College, London, argues that:

I think one could make the case that certainly these people will be active in one form or another. At least if they are not immediately going to come back and pose a direct and immediate threat to the United Kingdom, they will nonetheless, I think to some extent, be building networks, will become charismatic leaders and figureheads in their own right, and of course have the kudos or cachet of having participated in this conflict, so for another generation of young men they will be seen as role models in one light or another (Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2014:68).

This has produced a situation in which conflicts can incorporate a 'frequent and smooth transition from guerrilla warfare within the conflict at stake to more transnational terrorist operations' (Hegghammer, cited in Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2014:19). In other words, while individual groups may have small numbers, the overall force is global, opportunistic and widely dispersed.

Chaliand and Blin (2007:6) highlight the contrast between 'bottom-up terrorism' and 'top-down (state) terrorism [which] has been far more prevalent throughout history'. The saturation bombings of Dresden and Tokyo and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War are examples of top-down terrorism (Chaliand and Blin 2007:7), as well as some of the acts carried out as part of more recent conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Many of the bottom-up terrorism acts of today are explained as reactions to such top-down terrorism, as is apparent in the manner in which the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) included graphic images of small children and other civilian casualties in the video of their execution of the Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kaseasbehe (Black 2015).

2. BOTTOM-UP TERRORISM, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CULTURAL TRAUMA

While international law provides a framework for protecting cultural heritage during armed conflict international conventions between state parties are becoming increasingly irrelevant, even if all state parties ratify them. As Merari (2007:30) states, ‘terrorism more than any other form of warfare systematically breaches the internationally accepted rules of war’. Small groups who do not have a responsibility to adhere to international conventions undertake local or regional conflicts. Moreover, such conventions may be antithetical to the group’s aims, especially if these aims are embedded in a desire to attack the beliefs of an opposing group. Indeed, some conflicts are aimed specifically at the material and symbolic manifestations of ethnic, ethno-national, ideological or religious beliefs, exemplified in contexts as varied as the destruction of Aztec cities by Cortez and the carpet bombings of Dresden and Tokyo in the Second World War (Bevan 2006).

The methodical destruction of cultural icons has been termed ‘cultural trauma’ (Debs 2013) and is associated with the ‘cultural wounding’ described by Kearney (2014). In such cases, iconic structures are not only a focus of meanings about the larger trauma; their loss becomes the trauma. The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, is perhaps the best-known example of an attack on a cultural icon that resonated at city, country and global levels. As a symbol of global capitalism, the iconic nature of the complex was reinforced both through its daily use by 50,000 people (Johnson and Ross 2015) and various design features, such as the Windows on the World Restaurant and features donated from different countries, as well as through its constant portrayal in movies, television shows and tourist souvenirs (Figure 3). A certain amount of hubris was embedded in these portrayals (Figure 4). The height, hubris and hype converged in the September 11th attacks, which ‘signified a reaction against not only the materiality of the structures in New York, but also the symbol of globalisation realised through global trade’ (Fisher 2005:57). Conversely, it is possible to argue that the World Trade Center only became a cultural icon *after* the attack – as suggested by the Freedom Tower replacement – which has itself been renamed in recognition of the additional target status that it will garner. The critical point is that the events of September 11th were seminal in terms of using visual images to heighten the impact of terrorism on architectural targets.



Figure 3. Postcards of The World Trade Center.



Figure 4. Hubris encoded in advertisements by Asbestos and the Steel Institute of New York based on The World Trade Center.

While the events on September 11th were a new experience for America in terms of the manifestation of international conflict on her own soil (with the notable exception of the bombing of Pearl Harbour during the Second World War) this is much more the norm for people in many parts of the world. The United States and her allies inflicted this kind of pain on Europe and Japan during the Second World War. However, these were largely localised traumas. In contrast, the destruction of the World Trade Center had a personal dimension for the

many millions of people from around the world who had visited the site since its construction in 1972. According to Johnson and Ross (2015), 50,000 people worked in the World Trade Centre complex, while an additional 200,000 people visited or passed through it each day. While many of these would have been local visitors to the shopping mall or subway stations that were part of the centre, a large number would have been national or international visitors to this iconic place. Graphic visual dissemination of the destruction of the World Trade Center meant that people who had visited it were individually impacted, with a sense of ‘there but for the grace of God, go I’. This symbolic violence had unprecedented impact in terms of both psychological depth and global range. As Nemeth (2011) points out, it resonated cross-culturally, demonstrated the political effectiveness of such acts and highlighted the vulnerabilities associated with cultural icons. More importantly for my argument, the visual reports of the attack and its aftermath—captured from many angles simultaneously by people on the street as the events unfolded—conveyed a range of significant symbols and values to viewers through personal and formal media across the world (Fahmy and Cho 2009). The durability of this media has ensured that these images continue to be experienced long after the event, epitomizing the notion of cultural trauma.

The depths of cultural trauma depends on the capacity to impact group (rather than individual) identity (Alexander et al. 2004:1). Accordingly, obvious symbolic targets are those associated with group identity, especially those associated with cultural or ethnic groups, or with a particular state. Halas (2008:105) maintains that a characteristic feature of modernity is the transformation of ethno-symbolic collective memories into historical memories by the state. As signifiers of the hegemony of historical memory, architecture in its many forms is an obvious target for symbolic destruction:

Architecture in the twentieth century became more and more a weapon of war rather than something that gets in the way of its smooth conduct. Architecture is not just maimed in the crossfire; it is targeted for assassination or mass murder (Bevan 2006:210).

The catastrophic destruction of architecture during the 1992–1996 siege of Sarajevo, in fact, gave rise to the term ‘warchitecture’ in an attempt to capture the inter-relationships between architecture and war (Herscher 2008). Blurring the conceptual border between ‘war’ and ‘architecture’, ‘warchitecture’ opens up new ways to examine and understand the fate of architecture in conflict and points to the centrality of cultural icons—be they monuments, buildings or other sites of cultural importance—as a focus for destruction during times of conflict.

3. THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF COMMUNICATION

The current media revolution has provoked massive changes in the way that information is communicated globally (Poe 2011). Contemporary global communication encompasses both mass communication and networked communication. Mass communication distributes information from a central source through centralised media, such as newspapers, radio and television. This media is dominated by large organizations, some of which are state-owned, and disperses mainstream information through controlled channels of distribution (Cardoso 2008; Watson 2012:3). Networked communication, on the other hand, distributes information from diverse sources, including non-traditional media sources, such as ordinary people on the street, and therefore expresses diverse views. It manifests in a variety of formats, such as email, teleconferences, Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media. A critical difference between mass and networked communication concerns a transformation in the role of the audience from being a passive receiver of centralised information to being the receiver, interpreter and generator of diverse and individualised messages within a social network (Cardoso 2008).

Zaharna (2007) points to the emergence of a 'soft power differential', in which communication dynamics in the international political arena are defined by how political players communicate with their public:

Forty years ago, during the Cold War era, a bipolar rivalry between two identifiable government powers — with comparable communication capabilities and constraints — defined the communication dynamics of the international political arena. Broadcasts were limited, and could be monitored and controlled. Foreign and domestic audiences were separated geographically and politically, making it possible to speak to one without confusing or alienating the other. The prevalence of government-controlled media made the 'free flow of information' a cherished commodity. No matter how much information the two sides pumped out, the neatly defined bipolar context provided an overarching, ready-made framework for sorting and interpreting information. 'Us versus them' had persuasive power (Zaharna 2007:215).

Within the mass communication environment of the Cold War era governments could disperse conflicting interpretations of the same event without fear of contradictory interpretations taking hold within their particular communication realm. As Zaharna (2007:217) observes, the persuasive ability of such mass communication rested in its control over the medium by which the message was dispersed as much as the message itself. While mass communication continues

to be used by governments, the persuasive power of a mass communication environment has been radically challenged through the emergence of networked communications. Within this context, North Korea or China's tight control over networked communication (e.g. Liu 2013) can be understood as a rational approach to maintaining power through control of the communication environment.

The authority of mass communication is under challenge from networked media that facilitates multi-directional communication among a large number of individuals. The establishment of 'blogs' has provided alternative sources of information, shifting reporting from the ostensibly objective viewpoints of mainstream journalists to a complex mix of subjective perspectives from a variety of players (Bennett 2013:37). Further, where mass media reports have been largely one-way communications, blogging allows audiences to interact with published news reports and to forward them through their own networks, generating their own form of mass communication. Moreover, networked media can be used for low-level resistance in totalitarian states. In China, for example, rumours mediated through texting or calling on mobile phones have evolved into a special form of popular resistance at the grassroots level (Liu 2013). In addition, online independent media, such as *The Conversation* (2015), have deliberately targeted the hegemony of large media organisations, providing independent sources of news and analysis.

Effective visual communication is fundamental to effective networked communication. This is particularly the case for social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Glance (2015) argues that videos and photos are driving the use of social media and that this partly explains the dominance of Facebook, with 1.35 billion monthly active users (Socialbakers 2015), over Twitter, with 284 million monthly active users (Twitter 2015). Glance points to annual surveys undertaken by the Pew Research Centre in the United States that have identified photos and videos as the most important things that people wish to share on social media (Glance 2015). He further argues that the centrality of visual images to social media is demonstrated by the recent growth in the photo- and video-sharing site Instagram, that now outstrips Twitter in usage in the United States (Duggan et al. 2015:2). This concern with visual communication is also emerging in the use of the internet by groups involved in conflict. Bockstette (2008:13) states that 'the media rhetoric [of jihadists] is commonly built around the visual component', and that 'email, skype and other VOIP [Voice Over Internet Protocols] programs are increasingly using visual modes of communication', while McDonald (2014) points to a 'new grammar of violence' in which brutal videos are posted to social media. What are the effects of the new, increasingly visual, communication environment on cultural icons in times of conflict?

4. THE DESTRUCTION OF WORLD HERITAGE AS GLOBAL PROPAGANDA

The annihilation of the World Trade Center and the destruction of the Buddhas of the Bamiyan Valley of Afghanistan, both in 2001, are the earliest examples of using modern communications as a tool to magnify the impact of cultural heritage destruction. While both actions aimed to produce global impact, there is a significant difference in the strategies behind the two events: the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, arguably the symbolic heart of global capitalism, resulted in the loss of almost 2,753 lives, while the destruction in Afghanistan focussed solely on cultural property, the highly symbolic Bamiyan Buddhas. Screened throughout the world, the latter event was the first example outside of warfare of the destruction of cultural heritage as global propaganda.

The Taliban first expressed their intention to destroy the Buddhas in 1998, probing the international response to their destruction (Nemeth 2011:217). On 26 February 2001, drawing upon the mass media communication capabilities of the time, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan issued an edict providing advance notice that 'all statutes and non-Islamic shrines' would be destroyed (Manhart 2009:38). In contrast to normal protocols, international journalists were given permission to document destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Rogers 2011:112). Images of the annihilation of the Buddhas were given worldwide distribution and infused global memories (Figure 5). Calls by Muslims throughout the world for the preservation of this cultural heritage in Afghanistan were ignored and an association between the iconoclast destruction of images and the beliefs of conservative Islam was seared into the popular imagination of the West. In the process, Islamic Fundamentalism emerged as the contemporary 'other' of the Western world. As Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2003:93) comments, neither the looting of terracotta figures in Mali in the 1990s (Sanogo 1999) nor the flooding of thousands of sites in China which occurred at the same time received the same level of global attention as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. The key element lay with two intertwined factors that continue to underpin modern perceptions of conflict: the power of visual imagery and the communicative capacity of modern media.

One noteworthy reaction to the destruction of the Buddhas was inscription of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley on the World Heritage in Danger list in 2003 (Jansen 2009). Thus, the outrage in Western countries that met the destruction of the Buddhas provides an indication of how highly monumental cultural heritage is valued in Western systems of knowledge (Rogers 2011; Bobin 2015). Moreover, it seems that we value most highly those things we are about to lose or have just lost.



Figure 5. Bamiyan Buddha in Afghanistan, one of the first examples of global communications being used to enhance the impact of cultural destruction (photo courtesy of David Adam Films).

The central issue for this paper, however, is that World Heritage sites become particularly vulnerable as meaning is constructed at a larger scale through modern media channels. The strategic use of media is highlighted in videos released via social media in February 2015 by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group (Shaheen 2015) which show men using sledgehammers to destroy several large statues at Mosul's museum (Figure 6). The way in which these videos are designed to establish the social and religious legitimacy of the people engaged in this destruction is discussed in Smith et al (in press). The legitimization of such violent acts requires skilful, unremitting and nuanced communication strategies.

The Taliban's use of communication media, for example, was early, sophisticated and flexible. Although all types of media were initially banned, with newspapers and magazines placed under strict government control, after the overthrow of the Taliban government in 2001 the emphasis quickly reversed. Colourful magazines with photographs of human beings and videos of fighting produced for local people in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Hairan (2010) points out, they are designed to garner support for the Taliban cause and to exploit religious, social, political, and cultural ties most effectively. Hairan argues that the internet:

... has proved the fastest and the most useful propaganda tool for the Taliban during these years. They have their own websites which are designed attractively and are full of all kinds of content such as

news stories, statements, religious sermons, photos, videos, audio messages, guerilla war guidelines and training manuals. They update the websites regularly and post all these data in five languages: Pashto, Dari, Urdu, Arabic and English. When any of the websites gets closed by CIA or the coalition forces, they shift it to another server and put it online with a slightly different name. Al-emarrah, Shahamat, and Tora-Bora are the main Taliban websites (Hairan blog 2010).



Figure 6. The destruction of statues by members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) at the museum in Mosul, Iraq.

Access to the internet via blogging and other forms of media provides ready networks for the dissemination of information to a worldwide audience, allowing extremist groups to broadcast their causes instantly and continuously. The reach of global communications means that extreme groups are able to connect with similar thinking individuals and recruit supporters, or gain moral, political or material support (Hammes 2005). Studies suggest that people join insurgencies in part because of their social networks (Bockstette 2008), which means that these groups can use networked communication and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to attract new members and turn passive supporters into active participants. More importantly, social networks are also peer networks, which means that they enable extreme groups to recruit new members through peer pressure, a powerful motivator. This general issue has been recognised by the Council of Europe (2004) for some time:

... modern information technologies have also allowed far better communication and networking of terrorist groups, leading to a new

form of international terrorism with an ‘a-territorial’ and ‘a-cultural dimension’, even if affiliation is claimed with a particular territory or culture (Bennett 2013:37).

A report by the British House of Commons Defence Committee (2015) estimated that members of the Islamic State post around 90,000 messages a day online. Elsewhere, Thomas Hegghammer, Director of Terrorism Research at The Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, is cited as stating that:

Syria is the most socially mediated conflict in history and there is an enormous amount of audio-visual documentation produced by rebels themselves, documenting the things they do [...] social media affects recruitment simply by linking people up—Facebook, for example. When someone travels to Syria and posts pictures from there and his friends see those pictures, those friends are more likely to be inspired to go. That is not really propaganda; that is just regular information conveyed through online social media that then facilitates recruitment (Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons 2014:48).

As Frey and Luechinger (2005: 142) point out, one of the defining characteristics of contemporary terrorism is the aim to have far-reaching effects beyond the immediate victims. The modern communications environment provides extremist groups with the chance to garner unprecedented public attention for their cause. An increasing reliance on the global communication of extreme acts to convey a political message is apparent in videos of radical acts, such as the decapitation of prisoners on the internet (Norland 2015) or the multi-angled recording of the execution of the Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kaseasbeh (Black 2015). Networked communications of the recent destruction of the World Heritage site of Palmyra and the be-heading of Palmyra antiquities scholar Khaled al-Asaad (Shaheen and Black 2015) highlight the role of cultural heritage and archaeology in this process.

Extreme actions, such as kidnapping and murder, involve a high degree of risk and few are willing to kill for their beliefs. As Hoffman (2006:38) points out, ‘many people harbour radical or extreme beliefs and many of them belong to radical or even illegal or proscribed political organisations ... [but] they cannot be considered terrorists’. In seeing a chain of connection between the forms of modern conflict, the powerful reach of networked communications and the entrenched symbolic value of cultural icons, I argue that World Heritage may become an attractive target for terrorists, not only as part as a highly symbolically-loaded statement of ideological purpose but also as a draw for media attention (Hoffman 1998, Crelinsten 1990, Wilkinson 2000). Indeed, one can speak of a symbiotic

relationship: terrorists depend on the media, and the media profit from reporting terrorist attacks (Frey and Luechinger 2005; Frey and Rohner 2007); it is notable that the circulation of the weekly French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, are reported to have increased from 60,000 to 3 million following shootings at the magazine's offices in January 2015 (Barrabi 2015).

DISCUSSION

Given recent changes in the nature of conflict and communication, it seems that World Heritage sites are in new peril. Firstly, while mainstream media is used traditionally to disseminate reactions to the destruction of cultural heritage, networked social media can be used to plan the event, for example by fine-tuning the selection of targets through identifying cultural icons that are valued most highly, or by a particular cultural group. Targets with maximum symbolic value, such as World Heritage sites, are likely to garner the greatest publicity for a particular cause. Combined with the strategic use of networked communications, the publicity surrounding such destruction may garner additional support or resources for the cause from like-minded individuals and the fact that these actions bring condemnation from opposing groups will be part of the plan.

Secondly, communication media can be used to exaggerate perceptions of power or conceal damage to an organisation, and therefore seeing will not always be believing. The critical point here, as Hoffman (2006:2) states, is that the threat of violence can be of equal importance as the act of violence. A terrorist threat against the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Kaaba (Masjid al-Haram) in Saudi Arabia or the lions of Trafalgar Square would generate widespread concern and a huge amount of media attention, providing global publicity for a cause, irrespective of whether the threat was real.

Thirdly, because of its unparalleled ability to reach individuals on a global scale networked media may be able to function as not only as a conduit for destruction but also as a mechanism for protection. Robert Bevan (2012) raises the possibility that the destruction of a community's cultural heritage could serve as an early warning system for mass killings by preparing the ground for the de-humanisation of a group and removing the presence of this 'other' from a city's fabric. Pointing to the destruction of Jewish cultural heritage by Nazi Germans on Kristallnacht (Figure 7), he argues that attacks on cultural icons—especially built heritage—should be incorporated into the early warning systems for genocide and mass-killing that are being developed for use by the United Nations and human rights and humanitarian organisations.



Figure 7. 1938 Interior of the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue in Berlin after Kristallnacht.

Recent changes in the nature of warfare and the modern media landscape have greatly increased the vulnerability of World Heritage sites to terrorist action. Unlike nation-state warfare, which traditionally emphasizes conquering or acquiring key resources or territory, small, dispersed groups driven by political and religious ideologies propel modern day conflicts. Such dispersed conflicts mean that the international conventions between state parties that one might hope would protect World Heritage sites are increasingly irrelevant. Moreover, the media landscape has opened up new, global channels of user-led communication. The media strategies of terrorist organisations allow powerful messages to reach massive numbers of people. As Rosebraugh (cited in Hoffman 2006:38) points out, there is no chain of command and no membership role, only a shared philosophy—and an emergent message to take action individually. This new trend of individual, sequestered action, in which people act without direction from an organisation but as part of a general ideological movement, protects terrorists from detection and widens their potential effect. Through social media, their impact is enhanced by the global visibility of their actions. However, while few people are willing to kill, many more would be willing to destroy a cultural heritage site. Taken together, recent transformations have created a new context in which the destruction of World Heritage sites can be a relatively low-risk choice for extremists seeking maximum impact for their political agendas. Given recent developments in communications and conflict, the iconic status of World Heritage sites is likely to make these sites increasingly valuable terrorist targets.

Lastly, while sites are ascribed to the World Heritage list on the basis of whether they fulfil the criteria for Outstanding Universal Value, not all people ascribe to this notion. As James Davies (email communication, 28th August 2015) has pointed out, the modernist and Eurocentric origins of the notion of Outstanding Universal Value contrast with the glocal and cultural relativist world in which we live. Moreover, these values were never congruent with the values of Indigenous peoples, who assert local ownership of cultural heritage (Smith and Wobst 2005), or local people in many parts of the world (Byrne 2010). One outcome of the failure of the West to engage with the alienation (or lack of attachment) that sectors of communities in non-Western countries may feel for World Heritage sites in their regions is that this alienation can impact upon their willingness to protect such sites from conflict. Moreover, the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor, both within countries and between countries, exacerbates feelings of alienation that can be used by terrorist organisations to retard the protection of World Heritage sites. The destruction of cultural heritage will remain a problem as long as cultural patrimony—and indeed World Heritage—is shaped primarily by Anglo-European concepts of heritage, and consequently aligned with viewpoints and values that are associated with the West.

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